

# **Attachment S**

THE 9/11  
COMMISSION  
REPORT



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Final Report of the  
National Commission on Terrorist  
Attacks Upon the United States

OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT EDITION

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Finally, Bin Ladin had another advantage: a substantial, worldwide organization. By the time he issued his February 1998 declaration of war, Bin Ladin had nurtured that organization for nearly ten years. He could attract, train, and use recruits for ever more ambitious attacks, rallying new adherents with each demonstration that his was the movement of the future.

## 2.3 THE RISE OF BIN LADIN AND AL QAEDA (1988–1992)

A decade of conflict in Afghanistan, from 1979 to 1989, gave Islamist extremists a rallying point and training field. A Communist government in Afghanistan gained power in 1978 but was unable to establish enduring control. At the end of 1979, the Soviet government sent in military units to ensure that the country would remain securely under Moscow's influence. The response was an Afghan national resistance movement that defeated Soviet forces.<sup>19</sup>

Young Muslims from around the world flocked to Afghanistan to join as volunteers in what was seen as a “holy war”—*jihad*—against an invader. The largest numbers came from the Middle East. Some were Saudis, and among them was Usama Bin Ladin.

Twenty-three when he arrived in Afghanistan in 1980, Bin Ladin was the seventeenth of 57 children of a Saudi construction magnate. Six feet five and thin, Bin Ladin appeared to be ungainly but was in fact quite athletic, skilled as a horseman, runner, climber, and soccer player. He had attended Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia. By some accounts, he had been interested there in religious studies, inspired by tape recordings of fiery sermons by Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian and a disciple of Qutb. Bin Ladin was conspicuous among the volunteers not because he showed evidence of religious learning but because he had access to some of his family's huge fortune. Though he took part in at least one actual battle, he became known chiefly as a person who generously helped fund the anti-Soviet jihad.<sup>20</sup>

Bin Ladin understood better than most of the volunteers the extent to which the continuation and eventual success of the jihad in Afghanistan depended on an increasingly complex, almost worldwide organization. This organization included a financial support network that came to be known as the “Golden Chain,” put together mainly by financiers in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states. Donations flowed through charities or other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Bin Ladin and the “Afghan Arabs” drew largely on funds raised by this network, whose agents roamed world markets to buy arms and supplies for the mujahideen, or “holy warriors.”<sup>21</sup>

Mosques, schools, and boardinghouses served as recruiting stations in many parts of the world, including the United States. Some were set up by Islamic extremists or their financial backers. Bin Ladin had an important part in this

There is also evidence that around this time Bin Laden sent out a number of feelers to the Iraqi regime, offering some cooperation. None are reported to have received a significant response. According to one report, Saddam Hussein's efforts at this time to rebuild relations with the Saudis and other Middle Eastern regimes led him to stay clear of Bin Laden.<sup>74</sup>

In mid-1998, the situation reversed; it was Iraq that reportedly took the initiative. In March 1998, after Bin Laden's public fatwa against the United States, two al Qaeda members reportedly went to Iraq to meet with Iraqi intelligence. In July, an Iraqi delegation traveled to Afghanistan to meet first with the Taliban and then with Bin Laden. Sources reported that one, or perhaps both, of these meetings was apparently arranged through Bin Laden's Egyptian deputy, Zawahiri, who had ties of his own to the Iraqis. In 1998, Iraq was under intensifying U.S. pressure, which culminated in a series of large air attacks in December.<sup>75</sup>

Similar meetings between Iraqi officials and Bin Laden or his aides may have occurred in 1999 during a period of some reported strains with the Taliban. According to the reporting, Iraqi officials offered Bin Laden a safe haven in Iraq. Bin Laden declined, apparently judging that his circumstances in Afghanistan remained more favorable than the Iraqi alternative. The reports describe friendly contacts and indicate some common themes in both sides' hatred of the United States. But to date we have seen no evidence that these or the earlier contacts ever developed into a collaborative operational relationship. Nor have we seen evidence indicating that Iraq cooperated with al Qaeda in developing or carrying out any attacks against the United States.<sup>76</sup>

Bin Laden eventually enjoyed a strong financial position in Afghanistan, thanks to Saudi and other financiers associated with the Golden Chain. Through his relationship with Mullah Omar—and the monetary and other benefits that it brought the Taliban—Bin Laden was able to circumvent restrictions; Mullah Omar would stand by him even when other Taliban leaders raised objections. Bin Laden appeared to have in Afghanistan a freedom of movement that he had lacked in Sudan. Al Qaeda members could travel freely within the country, enter and exit it without visas or any immigration procedures, purchase and import vehicles and weapons, and enjoy the use of official Afghan Ministry of Defense license plates. Al Qaeda also used the Afghan state-owned Ariana Airlines to courier money into the country.<sup>77</sup>

The Taliban seemed to open the doors to all who wanted to come to Afghanistan to train in the camps. The alliance with the Taliban provided al Qaeda a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes. While Bin Laden maintained his own al Qaeda guesthouses and camps for vetting and training recruits, he also provided support to and bene-

as did basic communications and the movement of money. Where electronic communications were regarded as insecure, al Qaeda relied even more heavily on couriers.

KSM and Abu Zubaydah each played key roles in facilitating travel for al Qaeda operatives. In addition, al Qaeda had an office of passports and host country issues under its security committee. The office was located at the Kandahar airport and was managed by Atef. The committee altered papers, including passports, visas, and identification cards.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, certain al Qaeda members were charged with organizing passport collection schemes to keep the pipeline of fraudulent documents flowing. To this end, al Qaeda required jihadists to turn in their passports before going to the front lines in Afghanistan. If they were killed, their passports were recycled for use.<sup>107</sup> The operational mission training course taught operatives how to forge documents. Certain passport alteration methods, which included substituting photos and erasing and adding travel cachets, were also taught. Manuals demonstrating the technique for “cleaning” visas were reportedly circulated among operatives. Mohamed Atta and Zakariya Essabar were reported to have been trained in passport alteration.<sup>108</sup>

The purpose of all this training was twofold: to develop an institutional capacity for document forgery and to enable operatives to make necessary adjustments in the field. It was well-known, for example, that if a Saudi traveled to Afghanistan via Pakistan, then on his return to Saudi Arabia his passport, bearing a Pakistani stamp, would be confiscated. So operatives either erased the Pakistani visas from their passports or traveled through Iran, which did not stamp visas directly into passports.<sup>109</sup>

## 5.4 A MONEY TRAIL?

Bin Ladin and his aides did not need a very large sum to finance their planned attack on America. The 9/11 plotters eventually spent somewhere between \$400,000 and \$500,000 to plan and conduct their attack. Consistent with the importance of the project, al Qaeda funded the plotters. KSM provided his operatives with nearly all the money they needed to travel to the United States, train, and live. The plotters’ tradecraft was not especially sophisticated, but it was good enough. They moved, stored, and spent their money in ordinary ways, easily defeating the detection mechanisms in place at the time.<sup>110</sup> The origin of the funds remains unknown, although we have a general idea of how al Qaeda financed itself during the period leading up to 9/11.

### **General Financing**

As we explained in chapter 2, Bin Ladin did not fund al Qaeda through a personal fortune and a network of businesses in Sudan. Instead, al Qaeda relied primarily on a fund-raising network developed over time. The CIA

now estimates that it cost al Qaeda about \$30 million per year to sustain its activities before 9/11 and that this money was raised almost entirely through donations.<sup>111</sup>

For many years, the United States thought Bin Ladin financed al Qaeda's expenses through a vast personal inheritance. Bin Ladin purportedly inherited approximately \$300 million when his father died, and was rumored to have had access to these funds to wage jihad while in Sudan and Afghanistan and to secure his leadership position in al Qaeda. In early 2000, the U.S. government discovered a different reality: roughly from 1970 through 1994, Bin Ladin received about \$1 million per year—a significant sum, to be sure, but not a \$300 million fortune that could be used to fund jihad.<sup>112</sup> Then, as part of a Saudi government crackdown early in the 1990s, the Bin Ladin family was forced to find a buyer for Usama's share of the family company in 1994. The Saudi government subsequently froze the proceeds of the sale. This action had the effect of divesting Bin Ladin of what otherwise might indeed have been a large fortune.<sup>113</sup>

Nor were Bin Ladin's assets in Sudan a source of money for al Qaeda. When Bin Ladin lived in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, he owned a number of businesses and other assets. These could not have provided significant income, as most were small or not economically viable. When Bin Ladin left in 1996, it appears that the Sudanese government expropriated all his assets: he left Sudan with practically nothing. When Bin Ladin arrived in Afghanistan, he relied on the Taliban until he was able to reinvigorate his fund-raising efforts by drawing on ties to wealthy Saudi individuals that he had established during the Afghan war in the 1980s.<sup>114</sup>

Al Qaeda appears to have relied on a core group of financial facilitators who raised money from a variety of donors and other fund-raisers, primarily in the Gulf countries and particularly in Saudi Arabia.<sup>115</sup> Some individual donors surely knew, and others did not, the ultimate destination of their donations. Al Qaeda and its friends took advantage of Islam's strong calls for charitable giving, *zakat*. These financial facilitators also appeared to rely heavily on certain imams at mosques who were willing to divert zakat donations to al Qaeda's cause.<sup>116</sup>

Al Qaeda also collected money from employees of corrupt charities.<sup>117</sup> It took two approaches to using charities for fund-raising. One was to rely on al Qaeda sympathizers in specific foreign branch offices of large, international charities—particularly those with lax external oversight and ineffective internal controls, such as the Saudi-based al Haramain Islamic Foundation.<sup>118</sup> Smaller charities in various parts of the globe were funded by these large Gulf charities and had employees who would siphon the money to al Qaeda.<sup>119</sup>

In addition, entire charities, such as the al Wafa organization, may have unwittingly participated in funneling money to al Qaeda. In those cases, al Qaeda operatives controlled the entire organization, including access to bank

accounts.<sup>120</sup> Charities were a source of money and also provided significant cover, which enabled operatives to travel undetected under the guise of working for a humanitarian organization.

It does not appear that any government other than the Taliban financially supported al Qaeda before 9/11, although some governments may have contained al Qaeda sympathizers who turned a blind eye to al Qaeda's fund-raising activities.<sup>121</sup> Saudi Arabia has long been considered the primary source of al Qaeda funding, but we have found no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded the organization. (This conclusion does not exclude the likelihood that charities with significant Saudi government sponsorship diverted funds to al Qaeda.)<sup>122</sup>

Still, al Qaeda found fertile fund-raising ground in Saudi Arabia, where extreme religious views are common and charitable giving was both essential to the culture and subject to very limited oversight.<sup>123</sup> Al Qaeda also sought money from wealthy donors in other Gulf states.

Al Qaeda frequently moved the money it raised by *hawala*, an informal and ancient trust-based system for transferring funds.<sup>124</sup> In some ways, al Qaeda had no choice after its move to Afghanistan in 1996: first, the banking system there was antiquated and undependable; and second, formal banking was risky due to the scrutiny that al Qaeda received after the August 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, including UN resolutions against it and the Taliban.<sup>125</sup> Bin Laden relied on the established hawala networks operating in Pakistan, in Dubai, and throughout the Middle East to transfer funds efficiently. Hawaladars associated with al Qaeda may have used banks to move and store money, as did various al Qaeda fund-raisers and operatives outside of Afghanistan, but there is little evidence that Bin Laden or core al Qaeda members used banks while in Afghanistan.<sup>126</sup>

Before 9/11, al Qaeda spent funds as quickly as it received them. Actual terrorist operations represented a relatively small part of al Qaeda's estimated \$30 million annual operating budget. Al Qaeda funded salaries for jihadists, training camps, airfields, vehicles, arms, and the development of training manuals. Bin Laden provided approximately \$10–\$20 million per year to the Taliban in return for safe haven. Bin Laden also may have used money to create alliances with other terrorist organizations, although it is unlikely that al Qaeda was funding an overall jihad program. Rather, Bin Laden selectively provided start-up funds to new groups or money for specific terrorist operations.<sup>127</sup>

Al Qaeda has been alleged to have used a variety of illegitimate means, particularly drug trafficking and conflict diamonds, to finance itself. While the drug trade was a source of income for the Taliban, it did not serve the same purpose for al Qaeda, and there is no reliable evidence that Bin Laden was involved in or made his money through drug trafficking.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, we have seen no persuasive evidence that al Qaeda funded itself by trading in African conflict diamonds.<sup>129</sup> There also have been claims that al Qaeda financed itself through